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NATO and Energy Security

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Summary

Energy security is becoming an issue of increasing importance to the United States and its European allies, as some energy producers are showing a tendency to use oil and gas as political leverage. Although most European allies believe that a market solution exists to ensure security of energy supplies, NATO has begun to discuss the issue as an allied concern. This report¹ will be updated periodically. See also CRS Report RL32342, *NATO and the European Union*, by Kristin Archick and Paul Gallis.

Energy as a Security Issue

Over the last several years, the view has grown that the power to ensure access to international energy resources has shifted away from energy consumers to energy producers. The growth of China and India as large consumers of energy, coupled with an inability to develop reliable and affordable alternatives to oil and natural gas, has led to this development.² In December 2005-January 2006, when Russia dramatically raised the price of natural gas that it was supplying to Ukraine, many saw an effort to squeeze Ukraine politically and economically to secure Kiev within Russia's orbit. Moscow's effort also underscored the shift towards the ability of energy producers to exert pressure on countries dependent upon them for supplies.³ In addition, Russia's actions made the issue of energy security a high-priority item on the European Union's agenda.

The United States and its European allies have begun to discuss the appropriate institutions and policies for ensuring energy security. The Bush Administration introduced a discussion of energy security at NATO in February 2006, with the support of key allies such as Britain and Germany. At the same time, EU governments view energy security in a broad manner, and most believe that political and economic measures are the first

¹ This study was originally a memorandum for Senator Richard Lugar and is printed as a CRS report with his permission.

² Paolo Scaroni, "Europeans Must Face the Threat to Energy Supplies," *Financial Times*, Jan. 18, 2006, p. 15. Scaroni is head of ENI, the large Italian energy firm.

³ See CRS Report RS22378, *Russia's Cutoff of Natural Gas to Ukraine: Context and Implications*, by Bernard Gelb, Jim Nichol, and Steven Woehrel.

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steps to ensure access to energy resources. Most EU members are also members of NATO, and energy security may emerge as an issue handled in a complementary manner by the two organizations.

European Views on Energy Security

Most European countries are heavily reliant upon imported energy. Today, EU countries as a whole import 50% of their energy needs, a figure expected to rise to 70% by 2030. Russia is a key supplier of oil and natural gas. Germany imports 32% of its energy from Russia. Poland imports two-thirds of its natural gas needs from Russia, and 97% of its oil. As a whole, EU countries import 25% of their energy needs from Russia. In one estimate, by 2030 EU countries will import 40% of their gas needs from Russia, and 45% of their oil from the Middle East.⁴ (Russia's recent temporary cutoff of gas to Ukraine led to a reduction of natural gas supply in parts of the EU, as some EU states draw from the same pipeline.) In addition, oil in particular is found largely in unstable areas of the world such as the Middle East, a factor in U.S. and European concerns over energy security.

European governments view energy security issues primarily in an economic and political context. The EU is floating a proposal meant to build interdependence between EU members and Russia to secure reliable energy supplies from Russia. The EU will reportedly propose to Russia a structured arrangement in which Russia would be able to sell energy not only to its principal customers in central and eastern Europe, but to more distant customers in France, Italy, and Spain. In return, the EU is asking Moscow to allow European companies to develop Russian energy reserves.⁵

To complete such a deal, the EU must first open more of its own internal market to outside competition. Today, national governments may establish their own regulations concerning the electricity and natural gas market. France and Spain, for example, are excluding foreign buyers from bidding on national energy firms, a practice that tends to lock up customers for favored national companies. Energy competition in the Union will be regulated by the EU only from mid-2007, although the degree of that regulation has not been established. To prevent impediments to competition and to improve energy security, the EU Commission is urging new infrastructure, including terminals for receiving liquified natural gas; the construction of new pipelines from the Caspian region and North Africa; and single European energy grids for both continental electricity and natural gas markets that would challenge the grip of national energy firms on their national markets.⁶

⁴ The United States also relies heavily on imported energy. In 1960, the United States imported 18% of its petroleum; in 2003, that figure reached 58%. "Schroeder and Putin Cementing Relationship," *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 8, 2005, p. 3; "Gas Crisis a Warning for Europe," *International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 16, 2006, p. 3.

⁵ "Russia Insists It Is Reliable Gas Supplier," *Financial Times*, Mar. 14, 2006, p. 5.

⁶ "EU To Issue Warning on Foreign Energy Use," *International Herald Tribune*, Mar. 7, 2006, p. 1.

Few observers believe that Moscow's pricing agreement for its gas exports to Ukraine indicates that market process are working successfully. Some EU officials say that the agreement lacks transparency, and may mask involvement by criminal enterprises. They contend that Russia needs European (and other) firms' good will and continued investment in its decaying energy infrastructure to maintain existing production and develop its oil and gas reserves to sell energy products abroad.⁷

Some EU governments believe that close cooperation with Russia in energy commerce will not lead to energy security. Poland has raised the possibility of an EU energy treaty. The treaty would presuppose a continental energy grid able to offer supply flexibility in the region in the event of an energy shortfall, and would urge larger storage facilities. The treaty would have a provision similar to NATO's Article V mutual security clause, in which a signatory could invoke the aid of its treaty partners, this time to obtain part of their energy reserves in a period of significant shortage. The treaty would be open to NATO as well as EU members. Germany has reportedly opposed such an arrangement, in part because it excludes Russia, which Berlin believes would hinder efforts to build greater political and economic interdependence between the EU and Russia.⁸

Some European and U.S. officials draw conclusions from Russia's behavior that differ with the German view. From their perspective, Germany's longstanding post-war policy to develop a working relationship with Russia could weaken U.S. and European efforts to develop secure and reliable energy supplies from Russia and elsewhere. These officials believe that it is possible that a Germany increasingly reliant on Russian energy supplies will move away politically from its EU partners and the United States. East European states in particular, once in Moscow's sphere, believe that they could find themselves unable to ensure reliable and affordable energy supplies from Gazprom., the powerful state-controlled Russian energy company. These officials point to the former Schroeder government's deal with Gazprom to involve German companies in the development of a Russian-German gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea as a special arrangement that appears to promise a supply to Germany that other states might not enjoy. While new Chancellor Angela Merkel has indicated that she will follow a tougher overall policy towards Russia than her predecessor, east European officials note that as Chancellor she stated in her first address to the Bundestag that she will build a "strategic partnership" with Moscow.⁹

There are also governments that believe that Russia has little interest in market forces in the energy sector. In this view, Russia wishes to preserve energy prices at a high level in order to maximize profits. These governments note that the Russian government has a prevailing control over Gazprom, hardly a model of capitalist entrepreneurship, and that Gazprom was behaving like a monopoly in ratcheting up the price of natural gas to Ukraine. Knowing that Ukraine had no reliable alternatives for gas supply, Gazprom raised prices threefold and threatened to raise them sixfold. Gazprom also controls the

⁷ Interviews with European officials, Jan.-Feb. 2006; see also CRS Report RL33212, *Russian Oil and Gas Challenges*, by Bernard A. Gelb.

⁸ "Gazprom: La Reconversion De M. Schröder Scandalise la Pologne," *Le Monde*, Dec. 14, 2005, p. 9; "EU Urges an Energy Pact with the Russians," *International Herald Tribune*, Mar. 9, 2006, p. 1.

⁹ Interviews with U.S. and east European officials, Jan. 2006.

transit of non-Russian energy supplies to Ukraine, and threatened rapid rises in transit fees as well. Political motives seem apparent in such policies. In 2003, Putin himself reportedly said that Gazprom is a “powerful political and economic lever of influence over the rest of the world.”¹⁰

NATO and Energy Security

Some U.S. officials believe that NATO could play a role in building international political solidarity in the event of a deliberate disruption of energy flows. In this view, NATO might coordinate policies among member states and with non-member partner governments to share resources and to bring an end to an energy disruption. NATO might also provide security for infrastructure in energy-producing states facing unrest.

Iran has threatened to use its energy reserves to attain political objectives. In response to possible sanctions due to its refusal to comply with requirements by the International Atomic Energy Agency on its nuclear program, Iran has threatened to cut off or limit its energy supplies to buyers. Beyond deliberate policies affecting energy security, there are many countries in Central Asia and the Middle East that are unstable, have a need for new energy infrastructure investment, and have insecure transportation systems due to political unrest. Some of these countries are in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program, or desire a closer association with NATO.

NATO is moving into a period in which member states believe that the alliance must be a global player with global partners. This trend is evident in Afghanistan, for example, where Australia, New Zealand, and Japan are expending resources to bring stability through NATO’s International Security Assistance Force, even though the three countries are not NATO members. NATO’s role in energy security could be complementary to the EU’s effort to strengthen market forces and interdependence in the international energy sector. U.S. officials agree with their EU counterparts that market forces can lead to greater energy security. Diversification of supply, for example, through building more pipelines that are secure, is one course of action. Joint investment efforts to build such pipelines in and with energy producers such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan could be an important step in this direction. Both countries are members of NATO’s Partnership for Peace program, and are seeking closer relations with the United States and its allies.

Development of more liquified natural gas (LNG) transport and reception facilities from distant suppliers, such as Nigeria, into Europe could be another course of action. Coupled with the development of new oil and gas pipelines could be an offer from NATO (and/or EU) members to provide security for energy infrastructure in periods of unrest or conflict in supplier and transit countries.¹¹

The Military Option. NATO governments (although not NATO as a whole) have already been involved in military efforts to secure energy resources. The first Gulf War, while not a NATO operation, involved key member states such as the United States,

¹⁰ *Jamestown Eurasian DailyMonitor*, Jan. 19, 2006; Putin cited in “EU’s Barroso Demands Natural Gas Supply Assurances from Russia,” *Bloomberg News*, Mar. 16, 2006.

¹¹ Discussions at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Feb. 2006.

France, Britain, and Italy that sought not only to liberate Kuwait but also to ensure that Iraq did not control Kuwaiti oil and threaten Saudi Arabia and other Gulf producers.

NATO governments also took part in a military operation in the 1980s explicitly designed to secure the supply of oil. *Operation Earnest Will* was an effort, primarily by NATO states, to protect tanker traffic in the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Beginning in 1984, Iran first, and then Iraq, attacked neutral oil tankers to cut off the other's means of financial support. Iran attacked Kuwaiti and Saudi tankers in those two countries' own waters to ensure that all Gulf states understood that none was secure. The Soviet Union, followed shortly thereafter by the United States, made offers to the Kuwaitis, who lost the most tankers, to reflag their vessels under the USSR and the U.S. flags, an offer that was accepted. After Iraqi aircraft attacked the USS Stark in 1987, killing 37 sailors, the Reagan Administration formed a coalition of like-minded states, above all from NATO, to protect tanker traffic in the Gulf. Britain, France, and the Netherlands were important participants in *Operation Earnest Will*. The allies captured Iranian vessels mining shipping lanes in the Gulf, and engaged in firefights with Iranian troops using oil platforms to fire on ships. The operation was not a NATO operation but was an early example of a "coalition of the willing" working to bring security to a key strategic region.

In February 2006, NATO governments discussed a range of potential actions in the event of future disruption of oil supplies caused by military action. Some member states reportedly raised the possibility of protecting tanker traffic and oil platforms in periods of conflict, and using satellites to monitor developments in areas where energy resources come under threat.¹²

Conclusion

NATO is attempting to become a global security organization, still concentrating on protection of the interests of the United States and its European partners, but engaging non-member states as global partners. Discussions on energy security have already occurred at NATO, and will likely continue. NATO's role in energy security remains uncertain, however, as some individual members may prefer a greater role for the EU.

NATO and the EU have sought to enhance their cooperation and coordination. The association of the two organizations has often been complementary in nature. In Bosnia, for example, NATO deployed a large peacekeeping force for several years following a peace agreement, then turned Bosnia over to a smaller EU peacekeeping force. In Darfur, NATO provides military planning and lift and the EU provides financial assistance to African Union peacekeepers.

A political role in energy security for NATO seems most likely in the near future. Under NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative of 2004, the allies have begun discussions with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates to build practical cooperation in the security field, including the fight against terrorism.¹³ Some Middle Eastern

¹² Discussions with officials from several NATO governments, Feb. 2006.

¹³ Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, NATO, Brussels, Jan. 2006.

governments are concerned about terrorist attacks on their oil facilities, but it is not publicly known whether NATO has discussed this issue with the four governments.

Partnership for Peace countries, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, that are important energy producers often seek ways to associate themselves more closely with NATO, in part to diminish Russian influence on their soil, in part to develop reliable partners in an unstable region. It is possible that NATO will seek ways to provide security for the energy infrastructure of such countries. At the same time, the EU may encourage its member states to invest more heavily in that infrastructure.

There is division in the EU over management of the Union's growing dependence on Russian oil and gas. Several states, led by Poland, wish to engage NATO more fully in ensuring energy security in this relationship. While in the early stages of discussion, Poland is exploring a role for NATO and the United States, perhaps only diplomatically, in which U.S. leverage on Moscow could be an element for encouraging responsible Russian behavior and deflecting any Russian attempt to divide the Europeans.

A NATO role in energy security could prove to be premature. Most EU governments clearly prefer that market forces secure access to energy. A well-structured commercial partnership with Russia might be one mark of such a policy. Another would be the effort of the EU3 (Germany, France, and Britain) and the United States to curtail Iran's nuclear program. The EU3 desire completion of that effort in the UN before there is any discussion of a military organization like NATO assuming responsibility for a broader policy of energy security.

Some EU governments also believe that discussion of energy security at NATO sends the wrong signal to other governments, which might assume that the allies are contemplating military action to ensure the flow of oil and gas. Some of these governments propose instead that there first be a high-level "seminar" that include the United States, representatives of key EU countries, Russia, and such countries as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. There, some participants would reiterate the importance of market forces and the interdependence of producers and suppliers, and the need to protect and maintain energy infrastructure.

In addition, some NATO partner governments in Central Asia and the Middle East might be reluctant to accept allied assistance in securing the resource that is central to their survival. The belief is widespread in the Middle East that the United States invaded Iraq in part to secure access to its oil. There might be popular opposition to any NATO effort to secure energy infrastructure in some of these countries. Moreover, the United States has been unable to provide full security to pipelines in Iraq, and NATO might have similar difficulties in partnership countries. Russia is also a factor. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan depend upon Russia as a transit country for their pipeline shipments to the west, and could be subject to Moscow's pressure to spurn NATO proposals of assistance.